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MIAMI HERALD
3 August 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 21-A

The Beirut 7

WILLIAM Buckley has been a hostage for 505 days as of today. Mr. Buckley, a political officer at the U.S. embassy in Beirut, was kidnapped by Shiite Moslems on March 16, 1984. He turned 56 years old while in captivity. If he is still alive, he shares his plight — and perhaps his imprisonment — with captives Thomas Sutherland, the Rev. Benjamin Weir, Peter Kilburn, the Rev. Lawrence Martin Jenco, David Jacobsen, and Terry Anderson.

Families of the seven American hostages are doing everything within their frustratingly limited means to gain their release. They worried over the fates of their loved ones before, during, and after the TWA hostage crisis. They want their men to come home too — alive and soon. Their public questioning of the Reagan Administration's efforts toward that end is perfectly justified.

Several of the hostages are believed to be held for ransom by a Shiite family, which is equally concerned for a relative imprisoned in Kuwait. The difference between the families on the two sides is that the man held in Kuwait was convicted of the 1983 truck bombings of the American and French embassies there, which killed five people. The seven U.S. hostages are guilty only of being Americans in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In a statement responding to the U.S. families' plea not to allow the seven men

Keep Up Pressure

to be forgotten, the State Department said that it was making "every effort," including keeping in touch with "a number of parties in the region. That obviously includes Syria, which has a major role to play in Lebanon." But the Moslem fundamentalist groups, to which the abducting Shiite family is believed attached, traditionally act independently of Syria, warn Department spokesmen. That raises the question of how much leverage Syria actually has with the abductors.

To find out, the Administration should follow the lead of the hostages' families. The Administration should transfer the pressure that they are exerting on it to Syria, which seeks political control of Lebanon. Without control over those fundamentalist groups, Syria won't achieve its aim.

By gaining the hostages' release, Syria would enhance its position in Lebanon and its standing in the West. The satisfactory resolution of the TWA hijacking crisis proved that Syria can negotiate successfully with some factions within the internecine Lebanese political structure. For the sake of William Buckley and his six fellow captives, all involved parties should keep up unrelenting pressure for their quick and safe release.